

REVIEW: '09 BMW G650 Xcountry

REVIEW BY HEIN JONKER

When you first set eyes on the functional Xcountry, it's quite unusual looking. It's not an out-and-out off-road bike, it's let down in this respect by the close fitting front mudguard and only a plastic sump guard with a fairly wide and comfortable dual seat. Yet its wide bars, upswept exhaust, wide pegs and Metzler Tourance trail style tyres suggest that off-road riding is a possibility. I would have liked to have seen a better finish to the frame welds though; this is a BMW after all.

The riding position is very upright and forward and the way the seat is angled tips you forward into the small 9.5 litre tank which has comfortable sculpted cut-outs for your knees.

I found the cable operated clutch to be very light and smooth in application and the gearbox whilst still having a very positive action (another BMW trait) was not clunky and gear changes could be achieved with a fair degree of smoothness. The exhaust note from the large silencer is pleasant but not outstanding, raspy but fairly muted, perhaps the optional and more stylish Akrapovic™ slip on sport silencer would improve this.

The revised engine is a big improvement; at last they've done away with the vibration that is evident in the F650. This incarnation of the single cylinder engine is actually fairly smooth, this was a big surprise. Whilst the engines power delivery is quite punchy it did not seem to deliver the level of aggressive torque response I was expecting from a 650cc single, it's a little soft in its delivery! The engine does pull well in the mid range though and given a long enough stretch of road should reach its claimed top speed of approximately 170 km/h. The bike is 100% naked, this makes the bike hard work on freeways (not its natural habitat) with wind blast and turbulence.

At last someone has produced a digital speedo that's big and clear and easy to read, the Xcountry has a small instrument binnacle that has a big digital speed read out and the normal range of warning lights. A further surprise is that this BMW has the normal design indicator switch as found on most other bikes, may be this is a ploy to attract more riders to the range? This bike is all about having fun, it's instantly apparent that this really is a back roads bike. You can hustle it along twisty country roads and flick it in and out of bends with ease, aided by the wide bars and it's lightweight of only 160kg. The single cylinder engine is very willing and I soon found myself really warming to the bikes ability to cope with gravelly, muddy and downright potholed roads as if they were a smooth tarred freeway. The engine spins up quickly in the lower gears and is very tractable which makes off-road riding a delight. The Metzler Tourances providing ample grip for what can be impressive lean angles and are not easily thrown off line and the upright and slightly forward riding position soon seems to make sense, once you get into what this bike is about.

However fun is limited, in that this is not a true off-road bike, light green lanes, gravel tracks, forestry shale trails are all within its gambit, but the plastic sump guard, close front mudguard preclude real serious off-road riding. The wide rubber pegs, do allow you stand upright on the bike and it's very stable; for serious off-road riding though you need to consider the G650 X challenge. However I think it's a missed opportunity that the Xcountry's off-road capabilities could not be extended a bit more. After about 100km the seat seems to get increasingly hard, but then this bike doesn't have a massive fuel range, so you will be stopping for fuel occasionally and relieving your aching posterior. It only has a 9.5 litre tank and there is no fuel gauge, but a low fuel warning light comes on when there is approximately 2 litres left in the tank. BMW seem to have delivered on their promise of economy from this improved engine, so the bike has about a 190km tank range.

In the end I greatly enjoyed myself on the Xcountry, once again riding on roads not often travelled.

PRICE: R69 000.00 - Incl. 14% VAT



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